

Baptist Tabernacle



A strong past...a vibrant present...a promising future

But the Lord says, “Do not cling to events of the past or dwell on what happened long ago. Watch for the new thing I am going to do. It is happening already—you can see it now! I will make a road through the wilderness and give you streams of water there...They are the people I made for myself, and they will sing my praises!”

Isaiah 43:18-19, 21 (Good News Bible)

Our Story

We dedicate this history to the members and friends of Baptist Tabernacle, past and present. To give an account of all the outstanding supporters in our story would require volumes. But the names of all of them are known to God and written forever in His Book of Life. Without their faithfulness, we would not be here today.

We gratefully acknowledge the work of David Jones and Barbara Nanstiel in compiling and writing this history.

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.

1 Peter 2:9-10 (Revised Standard Version)

“In God we trust!”

These words were written in the first entry of record of the English Mission Sunday School of the Lee Park Baptist Church on October 17, 1897, by a man evidently of faith and determination. The minutes are unsigned. This date, October 17, 1897, marked the official beginning of Baptist Tabernacle.

The history of this church is one of struggle and dedication. It began toward the end of the 19th century shortly after the period of heaviest migration from the British Isles to America. But Baptist Tabernacle was not among the original Baptist congregations in the United States or in the Wyoming Valley.

Long before the American Revolution and, indeed, shortly after the landing of the Pilgrims, the first Baptist church in what is now known as the United States was established. Roger Williams, an English clergyman, found himself in disagreement with the Pilgrims in Massachusetts because of their establishment of a state religion. Fleeing an order for his deportation, Williams established a settlement at Providence, Rhode Island in 1636. He later accepted the practice of adult baptism by immersion and was baptized himself by a layman in 1639. With a small group of followers, he subsequently established the first Baptist church in America.

Another to have fled the intolerance of the established churches of Europe was the Reverend John Myles, considered to be the founder of the Baptist faith in Wales. Accompanied by the members of the little congregation which he had founded at Iison, near Swansea, Myles sought haven in Plymouth Colony in 1663. Here, not far from the Rhode Island boundary line, he reestablished his church and named the new settlement Swansea.

The first Baptist church in Pennsylvania is recorded as being established at Cold Springs, Bucks County, in 1684, and in the late 17th and early 18th centuries several churches of the Philadelphia Association were founded.

Our Wyoming Valley was then, in travel time, further away from the eastern seaports than India is today. But the spirit of freedom and religion led a Baptist minister, a Reverend Marsh, to Wyoming Valley in 1762, where he intended to establish a church. Soon after his arrival he and some of his followers were killed by Indians and the attempt was abandoned.

Although at the time the people were shaken and disorganized, by 1776 the first Baptist church in Wyoming Valley was established in Pittston, Pennsylvania, under J. Benedict. By 1875, the Wyoming Baptist Association listed twenty-one churches and the Welsh Baptist Association of Northeastern Pennsylvania listed 40 churches, several of which were scattered over a larger area.

By the late 1890s the two mother churches of Baptist Tabernacle were well established.

The Bethel Welsh Baptist Church was begun in 1884 and stood on Parrish Street in Wilkes-Barre. The Ebenezer [English] Baptist Church of Plymouth, from which the first pastor called by Baptist Tabernacle came, was formed in 1886.

Transportation was difficult. Few, if any, had cars. To reach a distant church was a slow and laborious process accomplished every Sunday only by dedication and perseverance. The churches of the time, therefore, were often started by small groups meeting regularly in the home of a nearby neighbor. These were people who knew each other, who often worked together and shared the same background.

Services and Sunday School were regularly held in the basement of Mr. Beynon's house, No.3 Loxley Street, Lee Park. This small group was led and ministered to by a Reverend Evans, the pastor of the Welsh Baptist Church on Parrish Street, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.

Because of the need to accommodate a growing congregation, the meeting place was changed from Loxley Street to Kline's Hall on Division Street, Lee Park, and then to Luzerne Street, Lee Park.

Rev. Evans and this group organized what was known as the First Baptist Church of Lee Park, a mission of the Welsh Bethel Baptist Church and in fellowship with the Welsh Association. All members of the Lee Park church were considered members of the Welsh Bethel mother church and received communion there.

Rev. Evans left for Wales to permanently reside there. In succession, a Reverend Thomas Morgan, then a Reverend William Reese filled the pulpit.

By 1897, perhaps because of their children, perhaps because of the surrounding Englishspeaking American environment, members of the congregation gave serious consideration to the wisdom of continuing the preaching services in Welsh. After a few meetings had been held about the matter, it was decided to call as pastor the Reverend John W. Hague of the Ebenezer Baptist Church of Plymouth, Pennsylvania, who reorganized the body into an English Baptist church.

This caused a division in the membership and those in favor of Welsh services continued to hold their services at Luzerne Street, retaining the name First Baptist Church of Lee Park.

In May 1898 a new building was begun on Dexter Street, Lee Park. By August it was finished and dedicated. The frame building had a seating capacity of 341. It had cost nearly \$1,500.00 and was valued at \$3,000.00. The group which favored the English service moved into this new sanctuary and it was this congregation which first used the name *Baptist Tabernacle*.

Thus, officially, Rev. Hague was the first pastor of Baptist Tabernacle and the Wyoming Baptist Association minutes list Tabernacle as admitted to the Association in 1898 as an independent church:

"Tabernacle: Our beloved pastor Reverend John Hague, started a mission in a hall here on the 17th of October last year under the wing of the Ebenezer Church, of Plymouth, and started to build a place of worship on the 1 Oth of last May which was dedicated July 31st.... On Aug. 8th a council of our association recognized us as an independent church.... Our pastor preaches the gospel steadily every Sabbath, both morning and evening. We hold weekly prayer meetings with much spiritual profit. Our Bible school is very promising under the superintendence of Brother James Williams. We had abandoned our B. Y.P. U. because of the warm weather, but will commence the meetings soon again. Our church property is worth fully \$3,000, but by the skill and earnest efforts of our pastor it has only cost us \$1,475"

In 1903, the church under Rev. Hague returned to the Welsh Baptist Association where it remained until his death. This action influenced some of the Welsh dissidents to rejoin with Rev. Hague's congregation. The more zealous took their letters to other Welsh churches and the First Baptist Church of Lee Park was disbanded.

Ironically the new home on Dexter Street—the sanctuary of the Baptists who believed in immersion—was near the banks of a stream named Solomon's Creek. This Baptist congregation was often troubled by high waters from the nearby creek. By 1908 the problem had convinced them to return to Luzerne Street where they remained for several years.

However, all was not worship and work during these years. The soul and the mind were administered to on Sundays and at prayer meetings, but the physical body was not forgotten.

Food has played an important part in the history of Baptist Tabernacle. There have been Class Suppers, Annual Suppers, Brotherhood Suppers. Ham, pork, chicken, turkey, and spaghetti suppers. Listed among some of the activities held in 1899 was an Oyster Supper in November. (In their one recorded moment of backsliding, a "1900" washing machine was chanced off at \$.10 a chance at this supper.)

At Christmas there was, and is, the gift of candy for each child. And for many years the women made chocolate-dipped cream Easter eggs of which there never seemed to be enough.

Perhaps the biggest secular event was the annual picnic. Committees were formed to arrange for picnic grounds, tickets and chartered cars.

*"Tabernacle Baptist Church, Lee Park at
San Souci Park, Friday, August 17, 1906
Admit One - 10 cents"*

In reality the one-day picnics were expeditions. Autos were few. The trolley or steam car was the mode of transportation available to most. For many years Harvey's Lake was an attraction because it not only involved a long trolley ride but also a boat ride across the lake to the Picnic Grounds.

During the first decade of the twentieth century, the activities were many and varied.

*"The Sunday School was to procure palms for the
baptism providing weather permits. Tea roses
to be purchased for those waiting baptism. "*

A surprising event for the early 1900's is listed in another entry.

*"Moved and seconded that the four dollars and seventy-five cents from the
moving picture entertainment given by Mr. Williams be turned over to the
treasurer of the Sunday School [carried]."*

Following the Oyster Suppers in the colder months, at the end of the year, of course, came Christmas.

*"\$12.05 is drawn for Christmas exercises.
For candy, \$6.60; for oranges, \$3.25;
for Santa Claus, \$1.00; candy boxes, \$1.20."*

And throughout the years monies were given to missions and the Baptist Orphanage in Philadelphia.

Of course, neither were prayers nor worship forgotten. Sunday School was held at 2 P.M. and Rev. Hague conducted preaching services in the morning and evening until death stopped him in 1911.

Shortly after Rev. Hague's death, the Reverend David M. Evans of Lee Park, being without a charge, volunteered his services. He soon resigned, however, because he said he had "changed his views on Bible Doctrine." However, he strongly recommended the members to seek the help and advice of the First Baptist Church of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.

By December 1912, the congregation had accepted this recommendation and the Reverend E.D. Kunkle of the First Baptist Church extended the hand of fellowship to 27 members of the First Baptist Church of Wilkes-Barre worshipping in Lee Park. The Tabernacle property was turned over to the First Baptist Church. Baptist Tabernacle soon rejoined the Wyoming Baptist Association.

The following years through the end of World War I were eventful and erratic. Rev. Kunkle and assistant pastors Rev. William R. Evans and Mr. H.G. Weston Smith supplied the Baptist Tabernacle pulpit.

During these years, the area's first Vacation Bible School originated in Baptist Tabernacle. Beginning on Monday, July 6, 1914, the school soon had an enrollment of 170 children who attended Monday through Friday from 9:30 to 11:30 A.M. for six weeks. Instruction was given in a variety of subjects for children from kindergarten through 14 years of age. The director of the school, H.G.W. Smith, a student pastor, considered the school's basic function to be creating a vocational and educational summer school which would keep children out of mischief while it developed in them better character in mind and morals. Each daily session included Bible study, music (including patriotic airs) and calisthenics. Mr. Smith was assisted by two aides and the faculty consisted of 18 teachers. Rev. E.C. Kunkle personally assumed the financial responsibility for the school which was entirely interdenominational.

In 1917-18 the Reverend A.K. Morris assumed the pastorate of the First Baptist Church. The later war years were evidently bleak. Rev. Morris was a chaplain in the United States Armed Forces and it appears that, for a few years, the Tabernacle on Luzerne Street depended heavily on its church and school officers and members to survive.

"Early in 1919 the sun was again shining for this little band of people who numbered only about seventy-five A student in Crozer Seminary was assigned to the work here by the State Board of Missions At the Easter offering in 1920 enough money was raised to payoff the mortgage on the property on Luzerne Street and about the middle of that year a call was issued...and he was ordained in a service held in the First Baptist Church."

"During his pastorate here the organization of the building committee and the starting of the preliminary work of the new church building was perfected. "

Here end these notes, identified by the Reverend William Hunt as having been written by the Reverend Charles M. Bond. Rev. Bond was the student pastor who had been sent by the State Board of Missions in 1919. Eventually he was ordained in the First Baptist Church of Wilkes-Barre as Assistant Pastor to the Reverend Charles Roush. Rev. Bond was then pastor of Baptist Tabernacle into 1922.

During the years of the First World War, evidently with no permanent pastor and little money, the congregation had allowed the building on Luzerne Street to be neglected. Eventually the State Fire Marshall explicitly wrote ordering that they repair it or tear it down.

Perhaps anticipating this, under Rev. Bond the members decided to purchase the lot at the corner of Regent and Division Streets and to build a new sanctuary. Lot 57 in Raymond Place was purchased in February 1920 for \$2,500.00 and deeded to the First Baptist Church of Wilkes-Barre.

The lot chosen was rock. This new church was to be built on rock. The excavation was begun. By pick and shovel, through dirt and bedrock, with and without dynamite in the hands of coal miners who were members, excavation for the foundation of the present structure was cleared by the men of the church.

The cost of this first stage of construction was to be \$24,000.00. The money was secured and bonded with the aid of the First Baptist Church. But this would not be the completed church. This basement auditorium was to be both sanctuary and Sunday school until the entire vision of the new church was completed.

In December 1922 the Reverend Thomas Elliot was called to Baptist Tabernacle. It is recorded that an anxious bride and groom were awaiting his coming. The wedding was performed on Saturday-the day after he arrived!

The plans for the entire building were drawn by T .H. Atherton and indicated that the cost was not to exceed \$50,000.00. In March 1923 a contract for \$23,081.00 was signed. The cornerstone was soon laid and on January 20, 1924 the new edifice was dedicated.

The speaker for the service was Rev. Kunkle, who was regarded as having been instrumental in the re-establishment of the Tabernacle congregation. His subject was "Stop Giving When the Lord Stops Giving to You."

The parsonage in that day was at 837 South Main Street.

Rev. Elliot resigned in October 1924 and the resident pulpit was vacant but supplied intermittently for several months by nearby ministers including Rev. Roush, Rev. Price, Rev. Hickman, Rev. Metz, Rev. Hill, Rev. Jones, Rev. Thomas, Rev. C. Evans, Rev. Kulp, Rev. Conway, Rev. Davis and Rev. Lewis.

These were active years. Some of the old customs were retained and renewed. Sunday School was now held in the morning but still between the morning and evening preaching. Thursday was an evening for prayer. Several Evangelistic campaigns, including a two-week crusade conducted at Tabernacle by the Reverend Margaret Joshua, instilled new fervor in the members. The rolls of Baptist camps and Association committees reveal regular participation by members of Baptist Tabernacle.

On October 1, 1925, the Reverend William Hunt came into the still-new building as Associate Pastor to Rev. Roush of the First Church. He continued his ministry at Tabernacle until he resigned in 1936.

By 1926 Sunday School enrollment had reached 267 and regular attendance was good. That year the adjoining lot at the corner of South Franklin and Division Streets was deeded to the First Baptist church to hold for Tabernacle. At the time the lot was being used by the South End Quoit Club but was owned by James Hiscox and his wife. Under lease, the Quoit Club erected a one story building on the lot. Later, this building was used by the church for various purposes, including Sunday School classes. The large space under the temporary roof of the church was also remodeled into classrooms.

Rev. Hunt's ministry at Baptist Tabernacle was a long and busy one, a period of growth and productive activity. Under him the church was involved in the George Stephens and the Sarah Palmer Evangelistic Campaigns. The 88th Annual Meeting of the Wyoming Baptist Association was held at Tabernacle with Rev. Hunt serving as moderator.

The Oyster Supper seems to have been forgotten. In its stead, the auditorium was often filled with the smells of turkey, pork, or ham suppers. The Annual Picnic was never neglected. Ice cream socials appeared at any time. There were the years of Prohibition and Repeal, the Depression, and the threat of war.

In 1936 Rev. Hunt resigned. During the end of that year and into 1937, Professor George R. Faint was interim pastor. In the latter months of 1937, the Reverend James H. Davis was called to the pulpit. He was listed as pastor at the Fortieth Anniversary of the church in 1937.

On January 20, 1938, after 27 years of receiving aid in moral support, in leadership, and in money as a mission of the First Baptist Church, Baptist Tabernacle again became an independent church when the new Charter was handed down by the court.

The years from 1936 to 1954 seemed to be a repetition of the 1912 to 1919 pastorates. Ministers came, stayed for a few years, then resigned. Rev. Davis resigned on November 17, 1940. During 1941 the congregation, with no resident pastor, was served by clergy from nearby churches. Professor Faint again came to the aid of the church, along with Rev. Barnes, Rev. Lewis, Rev. Hettinger, Rev. Ure, Rev. Smith, and Rev. Jones.

In February 1942, Professor Faint was ordained at Baptist Tabernacle. He served as interim pastor and also as attorney in 1942 when both properties and the mortgages on them were transferred from the First Baptist Church to Baptist Tabernacle.

The Reverend Ralph Madden was called in November of 1942. He remained as pastor until June 1945 when he resigned due to ill health, whereupon the Reverend Willard Edmunds of Parsons

Baptist Church supplied the pulpit. It was during this pastorate (in 1946) that the mortgage of 23 years was paid off, thus clearing the way for the completion of the church.

From 1946 to May 1948, the Reverend Daniel D. Harris preached and taught as pastor of Baptist Tabernacle. Between May and October 1948, Rev. Edmunds again served as parttime pastor.

In the late 1940s a house at 1223 South Main Street, Lee Park, was purchased as the new parsonage.

In 1950 the Baptist Tabernacle baseball team won two trophies in the Sunday School Baseball League and were honored at a dinner served by the NGU (Never Give Up) Class.

The Reverend Rudolph Libeck was called as pastor in October 1948 and remained until May 1952. Upon his resignation, the Reverend Myron Cheney was called and remained until April 1954.

At the time of Rev. Cheney's resignation, Earl Kohl, a layman who had been active in all capacities as a member of the church, was listed as a licentiate to preach. At the request of the church, he assumed the pastorate and upon his ordination in June 1954, he became full resident pastor of Baptist Tabernacle.

Earl Kohl, like many other members of Tabernacle, was also active in the Wyoming Baptist Association and, at one time or another, every office in the Association has been filled by a member of the congregation.

Picnics, church suppers and ice cream socials continued. In August 1954, Tabernacle was in charge of the Vesper Service at the new Baptist camp site near Clifford, Pennsylvania. The custom of carol singing outdoors at neighborhood houses around Christmas was carried on. A new Constitution was prepared and adopted.

But perhaps the most satisfying event was the building of the new sanctuary. Rev. Libeck had been a major impetus in getting the project underway. He organized the Tabernacle Youth Class and had members send out requests for \$1 to increase the Building Fund which, in 1952, had a balance of \$27.52. In 1956 bids were accepted for the construction of a new sanctuary atop the old structure which was still solid and had served both as church and Sunday School for 32 years. Work was begun that same year. The project was completed and the new sanctuary was dedicated on Easter in April 1957. Minutes of the Wyoming Baptist Association for that year value Baptist Tabernacle properties at \$93,000.00.

In the face of assuming such a large debt, members decided to undertake a regular fundraising project: baking and selling the pasties for which the women were justly famous. In 1955 two groups of ladies, the Rebecca Class and the NGU Class, obtained ovens. Two informal groups invested much time and effort in the ongoing project. One (consisting of men and women) met

every Tuesday evening to peel the potatoes and onions and mix the dough; the second group (women, the "housewives" of the church) gathered every Wednesday to assemble, bake and deliver the pasties. These "Welsh" goodies gained a wide reputation throughout the city and, at the peak of their popularity, over 600 were sold each week. To this day, the pasties are fondly remembered by the neighborhood and we are often asked when we are going to start making them again!

It was during the time of this construction that the congregation faced a second crisis of unity. A large block of stone formed a dividing point between the new and old structures on the Regent Street side. The name of the church was to be carved in the stone. When those early members began using "Baptist Tabernacle," they had done so in recognition of a shared heritage. They had begun by meeting in homes and had had to move from site to site, hoping someday to build a permanent sanctuary, much as the Israelites had worshipped in their tabernacle while wandering in the desert, before building a permanent temple in the Promised Land.

In later years, however, this reference was lost and many people identified the term "tabernacle" with tent-type revival services. At various times members would discuss changing the name, and the planned carving prompted a formal vote on the issue. By a very close margin, the name "Memorial Baptist" was chosen. However, many of the older members to whom the name was so significant were hurt. After listening to the muchrespected Tom Jones, who spoke with dismay of the possibility of another split, members voted again and made "Baptist Tabernacle" the unanimous choice.

Rev. Kohl and his wife Eva served the ministry well until his untimely death in August 1964. The congregation called the Reverend Milo Singer to the pulpit in 1965.

Rev. Singer was interested in electronics and it was during his tenure that the practice was first begun of audio taping the services so they could be taken to shut-ins. It was also during these years that, thanks to the extraordinary efforts of those who helped make the pasties, the debt was paid off and a mortgage burning service was held on April 13, 1969. The loan of more than \$100,000 had been discharged in less than 12 years with a congregation of only 65 families.

In 1965 the parsonage on South Main Street was sold and another much closer to the church, at 64 Division Street, was purchased.

In 1966 the church lost Martha and Thomas Jones, a couple whose dedication to the Lord and work on His behalf at Tabernacle continues to touch the lives of those who knew them.

In earlier years our youth had been active in national and state-wide groups such as the BYPD and Christian Endeavor. During the 1960s, there was still an active youth group, the BYF, which also interacted with similar groups in other Association churches. Besides times of fellowship, the group had a "wheelchair ministry" to assist patients at the V A Hospital in getting to chapel. Over the years each of three Baptist camps have been attended by Tabernacle members; and some of our teens worked on staff during summers while adults often served as counselors.

Annual picnics continued. Ice cream and strawberry socials sometimes meant cordoning off Division Street between Regent and South Franklin for a kind of "block" party.

In 1972 the church suffered only minor damage from the wide-spread flooding caused by Tropical Storm Agnes. Several members, however, experienced devastating damage to their homes. Likewise, the First Baptist Church of Wilkes-Barre, as well as many of its members, fell victim to the savage waters.

Rev. Singer was about to retire so, in an arrangement suggested by American Baptist headquarters, the church entered into a yoked fellowship with its sister church, and the Reverend Henry Medd, who was pastor of First Baptist began a period of fourteen years as pastor of Tabernacle.

The plays and minstrels of earlier decades were now replaced by the annual Family Night in May. Members joined for a light meal and a display of talent, ranging from the telling of jokes to poetry reading to harmonica playing.

In 1975 the front entrance of the church was redesigned and rebuilt, adding the current portico. New art glass doors were installed and four matching art glass windows symbolizing the Beatitudes were purchased with memorial gifts.

Because of an energy crisis in February 1977, union services were conducted with the Douglas Presbyterian Church on Lee Park Avenue, with both congregations meeting alternately at each site. The union services resumed in July and August when our respective pastors were on vacation. This summer meeting was to continue for many years. Vacation Bible School also became a combined annual program with Douglas.

During 1977 some needed refurbishing took place. The vestibule and downstairs assembly room, the Regent Street stairway and the "Junior Room" were painted. A concrete floor was installed in the assembly room. In September a stained glass window depicting Christ surrounded by the children was donated for over the Regent Street entrance.

The Women's Guild conducted a bake sale at the new Farmer's Market held each Thursday in the summer on Public Square in Wilkes-Barre. In addition they held a rummage sale. These were the only fund-raising projects of the group and all monies were designated for mission work.

A series of yearly Lenten studies was conducted by Rev. Medd.

Because of continuing problems due to condensation, the sanctuary skylight was removed in 1979 and replaced with material similar to the rest of the ceiling. The roof was replaced as well.

In 1980 members held a tribute to George Fell, a long-time member who had been the church Treasurer for many years and served on the Deacon Board. The program consisted of a recital by a guest organist and special music by our choir. A reception, prepared by the Women's Guild, followed.

Music has long been an important part of the life of our church. There have been times of both senior and youth choirs, and the numbers have swelled and declined. We have been blessed with vocal and instrumental soloists. But the primary purpose of the music program has always been to strengthen the worship experience with music which offers praise and thanksgiving and which reflects scripture messages, repentance, brotherhood, mission, and hope.

In 1981 a kitchen modernization project was begun. Used cupboards were purchased and these and other woodwork were refinished. The project was completed the following year.

In 1982 a program for collecting food for the Shepherd of the Streets project was begun and which continues to today in helping area food banks. That same year someone offered to purchase the parsonage, located across the street from the church at 64 Division Street. The decision was made not to sell.

In 1984 the pews in the sanctuary were refinished and a new door was installed at the Regent Street entrance. New choir robes were purchased. A VCR and TV were obtained for viewing educational materials.

By the time Reverend Medd announced his retirement in 1986, the congregation had become accustomed to a part-time pastor and the reduced financial burden that this arrangement entailed. Nevertheless, feeling that the future well-being of the church depended upon their having a full-time pastor, members voted to "step out in faith" and call a pastor of their own.

New technology made it possible for the pulpit committee to investigate many more candidates than had been possible in the past. Using guidelines provided by American Baptist Churches USA, the committee developed a profile of the church and determined the characteristics of the person who would best meet our needs. The process was long and required much work on the part of the committee. Using a computer, those characteristics were then matched against the profiles of hundreds of potential candidates in a database maintained by ABC.

Among those interviewed was the Reverend Paul Esswein who, in the course of his meetings with the Pulpit Committee, indicated that he and his wife Sue felt ultimately called to work in foreign missions. It was clear, then, that they would not stay with us for many years. But the Committee, after much prayer, was led to place his name before the congregation, feeling that, for the time he would serve, we could mutually help each other develop and grow. The Essweins joined us in August 1987.

Pastor Paul began a weekly Bible study and fellowship time intended to provide a more in-depth study of the Bible than he was able to do on Sunday mornings and to develop our relations within the body of Christ. His tenure also saw the Bylaws again revised. New

hymnals, which incorporated a blend of the great standard anthems and many of the fine new hymns and choruses of the contemporary church, added a wider dimension to our opportunities to praise God with song.

We formally enrolled in the Grow-by-Caring program and identified goals toward which we would work over the next several years. In 1990 we received an award stating we had fulfilled the nine marks on which "Grow by Caring" focuses. For 2 years we used the Adventures in Thanksgiving program of giving and sharing. Testimonies were received from a number of individuals and everyone had the opportunity to complete "wish" books of what they wanted to see accomplished in the church. Suggestions were discussed by the various boards who determined which could or should be implemented. Pastor Paul trained a small core group in the Partners with Anna and Andrew visitation program.

A project to develop a photo directory of the church was undertaken. Office equipment was brought up-to-date when a photocopier and an answering machine were purchased. We applied to and were accepted for participation in the ABC salary support program.

In 1989 the Essweins announced their plans to enter the mission field in Bolivia by 1991. As they were not able to obtain a post with American Baptist missions, they would be placed in the field by SIM, an international mission organization, and would be required to raise their own financial support. The members of Tabernacle responded with monetary and prayer support. In addition to making an initial donation of \$3000 from the church's scholarship fund, they undertook to take up a monthly offering in support of their ministry.

In 1990 the church accepted a brass cross, collection plates, an altar cross and candlesticks from the Welsh Presbyterian Church of Sugar Notch which had disbanded.

In 1991 we supported the John Wesley White/Franklin Graham Crusade for Christ which was held for several days in November.

The Essweins left for the mission field on December 26, 1991. Again the pulpit committee developed an updated description of our church and searched for a minister using profiles supplied by ABCDSA. After several months of study and consideration, a call was extended and the Reverend Janice Green began her ministry on May 24, 1992.

In 1992 a new copier was purchased. The women conducted their first rummage sale in 5 years. Pastor Jan began publishing a newsletter and, before Advent, held a Chrismons workshop in which members made symbolic decorations for the church Christmas tree. The beginning of Advent was celebrated with a Hanging of the Greens service.

The Sunday School offices were restructured; instead of a Superintendent, we now have Coordinators for various areas of responsibility.

We had been experiencing recurring problems with the organ and in 1995 the technician who was making repairs said we should seriously begin planning to replace the instrument. After researching the issue, the Music Committee recommended to the church the purchase of an Allen computerized organ. The church approved the purchase along with an "expander," which added scores of additional instruments to the sounds which can be played, and a "sequencer," which

enables the organist to "record" selections on a computer disk which can then be played back, much like a player piano.

In 1996 the church adopted a Mission Statement:

As Baptist Tabernacle we seek to know Jesus Christ and make Him known through: Worship, Education, Encouragement, Mission Support, Service, and Inviting Others to Join the Family of God.

As the adult Sunday School class was the only one with regular attendance, all classes were combined, often using a video followed by discussion for the lesson.

A persistent problem with water seepage in the lower level combined with unusual weather to bring about a crisis. For several days in the winter the kitchen floor was covered with water. A shop vac was bought to remove the water and two dehumidifiers were installed in the assembly room and the kitchen to help control the dampness which, over the years, has resulted in damage to the surface of the walls.

The churches of the South Wilkes-Barre Ministerium, of which Tabernacle had long been a member, held a progressive dinner and afternoon of fellowship.

Throughout our history the church and Sunday School have constantly given to those outside our own membership. We have several times been commended by ABC for our mission support, and minutes as far back as 1907 reflect concern for others away from the immediate church:

*"\$3.00 for San Francisco Sufferers [in 1906].
Collection of March 24, 1907, to be given to
Chinese Fund. "*

The Women's Guild has always designated its monies for mission projects. In 1996 they also began a personal mission relationship when they started sponsoring a girl of Sioux heritage at the Murrow Indian Children's Home.

In the spring of 1997, Pastor Jan announced that she would be leaving. Once again a pulpit committee was formed and continues searching to this date, trusting that the Lord will provide another shepherd who will guide us and help us grow in His work.

On October 18-19, 1997, the church celebrated its 100th anniversary, giving praise to God for what he had accomplished with us, and looking forward to what He would do in our future. On Saturday evening, a dinner was held at Genetti's, a local hotel, and the guest speaker was Dr. Richard Rusboldt. On Sunday a special service was held with several former pastors participating.

Shortly after the celebration the church issued a call to the Rev. William Frank who began his service on November 13.

The late 1990's and the turn of the century represented a period of stasis for the church. We recognized our graduates as they moved on from high school and college but we had no children in our midst and Sunday School consisted only of an adult class. We continued offering a combined Vacation Bible School with Christ United Presbyterian Church. The Women's Guild carried on their mission work.

In February 2001 we honored six couples who were celebrating 50 or more years of marriage: Edith and Glenn Garrison, Mrs. & Mrs. Curtis Goodwin, Louise and Peter Culp, Muriel and Charles Staley, Arleen and John Ebert, and Beatrice and Tom Murray, Jr.

Pastor Frank introduced a new variation to our services which continues to this day. On the third Sunday of each month, we have a mini-hymn sing. On that same Sunday, after the service we enjoy a coffee and cookie time, with hostess duties rotating among ladies of the congregation.

On September 16, 2001 we held a special prayer service for our country and the victims of the September 11th terrorist attacks.

During much of 2001, relations between the pastor and the congregation were strained, most likely because of problems in his personal life. The year ended with his taking a leave of absence and he formally resigned on January 9, 2002.

The Rev. Margaret Reid filled the pulpit during January and February, and the Rev. Scott Stevenson began serving us through American Baptist Churches' Minister at Large program on March 3. Rev. Reid's quiet gentleness and Scott's boisterous love helped the congregation heal after this period of pain and turmoil.

In July several members responded to an invitation to attend a meeting at First Baptist Church along with representatives of other local Baptist churches to share their concerns. Little interest in exploring a shared future was expressed by other churches, but further conversations between our church and First Baptist were held. While we continued to pay his salary, Rev. Stevenson also supplied their pulpit. Discussion of a possible merger continued through much of 2003 and the congregations invited each other to various social activities. In September First Baptist notified us that they had decided to pursue a different path for continuing as a congregation and thanked Baptist Tabernacle for the gift of Scott's time and talents.

On December 13, 2003 a fellowship dinner was held to introduce Kenneth P. Jordan and his wife to the church, and on December 14, the congregation voted to call him as pastor. A farewell celebration for Scott was held on December 21. Pastor Ken was approved by the Welsh-Wyoming Association as a lay minister and his certification/installation service was held on June 13.

Pastor Ken's tenure was marked by growth in size and spirit!

During 2002-3 the church received a number of generous gifts which enabled us to install a new roof on the church building and ceilings fans in the sanctuary and to upgrade the electrical service to the lower level.

Pastor Ken was approved by the Welsh-Wyoming Association as a lay minister on January 18, 2004 and his certification/installation service was held on June 13. Pastor Ken accompanied a number of youth to the Creation music festival and led adults in two special studies on “A Life God Rewards” and “The Purpose-Driven Life.”

Throughout its life our church has always strongly supported missions. In 2004, we surpassed our goals for American Baptist special mission offerings. Overall our increased gifts that year were almost 35% over the previous year and we were among the top 50 mission supporting churches in ABCOPAD.

A second circle of American Baptist Women was formed and took the name ”Women on a Mission.”

The year 2004 also saw a number of significant physical improvements to the church properties. Part of the front lawn was converted into a paved parking lot. The parsonage kitchen was remodeled. The pastor’s office was updated. And there were major improvements to the lower level, including a new ceiling and new windows.

While the previous year had been spent planning for a renewed Sunday School and developing our teachers, 2005 saw the results with new children’s classes meeting in remodeled rooms equipped with new furniture and supplies. For the first time in several years, we held our own Vacation Bible School. Pastor Ken accompanied a number of youth to the Creation music festival.

Morning and evening classes were held for adults in the spring and fall to explore special studies such as “The Purpose-Drive Life” and “Tough Questions” which focused on differing belief systems.

A number of significant physical improvements to the church properties took place. The church roof was replaced and ceiling fans were installed in the sanctuary. Part of the front lawn was converted into a paved parking lot. The parsonage kitchen was remodeled and the pastor’s office was updated. There were major improvements to the lower level, including a new ceiling and windows as well as an upgraded electrical service. The heating system in the church building was converted from oil to gas and a new sound system was installed in the sanctuary. We began a contract for a security system following vandalism at a number of local churches.

All in all, the year was marked by growth in size and spirit!

During 2005 two studies were again conducted in the spring (“Experiencing the Passion of the Christ”) and fall (“Treasure Principle”). For the first time in several years, we held our own Vacation Bible School. While 2004 had been spent planning for a renewed Sunday School and developing our teachers, 2005 saw the results with new children’s classes meeting in remodeled rooms equipped with new furniture and supplies.

We began an outreach to the local community with a “battery giveaway.” Children and adults ranged over the neighborhood during Fire Prevention Month, knocking on doors and distributing batteries for home smoke detectors. This yearly project continues to the present.

The heating system in the church building was converted from oil to gas. A new sound system was installed in the sanctuary.

For the second year in a row, our mission giving increased and a decision was made to contribute the “mission” money collected in Sunday School to the Bonillas, a missionary family serving in Chile, who had spoken at the church. Pastor Ken traveled to Nicaragua to help build at a mission site there, and we contributed to the support of Sam and Amy Smith from the Abington Association as they journeyed on their mission trip to Ghana, Africa.

The year 2006 was another exciting one for the family of Baptist Tabernacle.

We remained one of the top 50 churches in our ABCOPAD region for mission giving. For the first time in our history we went over the \$1000 mark in three of our four special offerings.

Classes were held in the morning and evening to accommodate those interested in our two special studies that year: “Tough Questions” which focused on differing belief systems and “Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God.”

The Trustees “slowed down” a bit with only a few additional projects: a new teen room, decorated to look like a warehouse; fresh paint and storage shelves and a utility sink for the furnace room; a new digital projector for the Sunday School; two wireless microphones along with a hearing assist system for the sanctuary; and a new computer for the office. They also contracted for a security/fire system following vandalism at a number of local churches.

The Deacons started a greeting program so that all members, friends and visitors are welcomed when they come out to church.

Following a custom instituted several years before, the church picnic was held at Frances Slocum State Park, with great food, games and fun for all.

Our second Annual Thanksgiving Dinner was held on November 19th. This affair was catered so that all members could fellowship together without worrying about food preparation. Pastor Ken and Aprile held their second Annual Christmas Party for members of the Official Board.

The Christmas Eve service was moved to an earlier time (6 PM) to accommodate families with young children. A children’s choir was reformed with the group singing on three occasions throughout the year.

In 2010, we called our first full time youth pastor, Christopher Hamilton, and he and his wife moved into the parsonage. Chris started 2 groups: The Rock for older teens and The Edge for those a bit younger. The church purchased a home (The Annex) next to the parsonage to create offices for the pastors and a place (The Link) for the youth to hang out and learn about God.

Youth group meetings were held each Tuesday evening, with an emphasis on getting into the Word of God; Bibles were given to many neighborhood children who had never before had a Bible of their own. The youth groups were active, engaging in church-based activities as well as attending outside events such as the Creation music festival and retreats at Camp Ichthus.

Physical improvements continued. The front steps to The Annex were replaced and its electrical service updated. The carpet in the sanctuary was replaced and the walls in the lower level repaired to counteract the persistent moisture problem. The Baptistry was refurbished. An Internet connection was added to the church and The Annex.

Pastor Ken was given a sabbatical leave during the summer of 2012. In the fall he announced his resignation, effective at the end of the year. At this time the Official Board reviewed our financial status. Our expenses had been exceeding our income since we had called a second pastor and it was determined that we could no longer support two full-time clergy. The Board asked Pastor Chris to become our Senior Pastor. After consideration and prayer, he indicated that he still felt strongly called to youth ministry and resigned effective the end of the year to accept a call elsewhere. The sale of the annex was approved since it was a drain on our finances and it appeared that the building would face major maintenance issues in the near future.

A Pulpit Committee was formed and worked in preparing a profile of our church and community. The Rev. Richard McIntyre became our Interim Pastor. The period after departure of a pastor is always difficult for a church. For Baptist Tabernacle this was such time. Attendance was down. Giving was down. Concerns and fear were up. But there continued a spirit of continued commitment and hope. A small group study was regularly held at a local restaurant both to engage in learning and to be a more visible witness to the community. It was also a difficult time for Rev. McIntyre who was diagnosed with cancer in 2017. The church worked to accommodate his need to be away for treatment while he served as our interim pastor and supported him and his wife Linda with our prayers and concern.

We continued with regular activities such as small group studies, special services to mark the church calendar, and activities such as the church picnic, Thanksgiving Dinner, Hanging of the Greens. Members continued to volunteer on committees, teaching Sunday School, singing, fundraising.

A Pulpit Committee continued to review the profiles of potential candidates to become our new pastor. Response rate to inquiries was very low but we recognized that, ultimately, the search was in God's hands and His timing is not our timing.

In late 2017, Region Pastor Kevin Walden brought to our attention a local couple who was interested in serving as a pastoral team. After meetings with the Pulpit Committee and an evening dinner with the congregation, a call was extended to Kelly and John Farrell to become our pastors beginning in March 2018. Unfortunately, it became apparent that the leadership of the Farrells was not working out. In July 2019, a congregational meeting was held in which the decision to terminate the relationship.

Various local preachers provided pulpit supply for the following several months as a new search committee was formed. Then in the spring of 2020 the church, along with others throughout the state, was forced to discontinue holding services because of the Covid19 pandemic. In-person worship resumed during the summer, again with pulpit supply, until Pastor Valerie Black accepted our call to become an extended interim supply pastor in October.

As we once more face the difficult challenge of finding a new pastor, we look back and celebrate the work that God has done in our past. From a beginning of struggle and sacrifice we grew to periods of large and active membership. There were times of sadness and disappointment; there were times of joy and success. At present our membership is a small part of what, at other moments, it has been. But we take heart from the lesson provided by two "small" characters in the scriptures. David was a small lad when God used him to slay a giant. Zaccheus was a man of small stature and small character when the Lord called him. When they opened themselves to being used by God, both became great. Who we have been and what we have done in our first hundred plus years is the outcome of putting our lives in the care of our Lord. Who we become likewise depends on the grace and mercy of God in Jesus Christ, who gives new stature to all who trust in Him. We thank Him and rejoice in the exciting and wonderful optimism He has brought to our present. And we give Him the glory for the things He will yet accomplish as we move out in faith into our future.

Pastors

1897-1911	Rev. John Hague
1911-1912	Rev. D.M. Evans
1913	Rev. William R. Evans
1914-1915	Rev. H. Weston Smith
1919-1922	Rev. Charles M. Bond
1923-1924	Rev. Thomas Elliott
1925-1936	Rev. William H. Hung
1936-1937	Rev. George R. Faint (interim)
1937-1940	Rev. James H. Davis
1941-1942	Rev. George R. Faint (interim)
1942-1945	Rev. Ralph Madden
1946-1948	Rev. Daniel D. Harris
1948	Rev. Willard R. Edmunds (interim)
1948-1952	Rev. Rudolph Libeck
1952-1954	Rev. Myron Cheney
1954-1964	Rev. Earl Kohl
1965-1972	Rev. Milo D. Singer
1972-1986	Rev. Henry Medd
1986-1987	Rev. Charles Capper, Rev. Thomas Goerlitz (interim)
1987-1991	Rev. Paul Esswein
1992-1997	Rev. Janice Green
1997-1998	Rev. Frank Gillett (interim)
1998	Rev. David Foulk (interim)
1998-2002	Rev. William Frank
2002-2003	Rev. Scott Stevenson (interim)
2004-2012	Pastor Kenneth P. Jordan
2013-2018	Rev. Richard McIntyre (interim)
2018-2019	Pastors Kelly and John Farrell
2019-2020	Pulpit Supplied by various preachers
2020-	Pastor Valerie Black